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TRANSLATIONS FROM THE RUTHENIAN
OF TARÁS SHEVCHÉNKO AND FROM
THE RUSSIAN OF MIKHAÍL
LÉRMONTOV



SIX LYRICS

FROM THE RUTHENIAN OF
TARÁS SHEVCHENKO

†
ALSO

THE SONG OF THE MERCHANT
KALÁSHNIKOV

FROM THE RUSSIAN OF
MIKHAÍL LÉRMONTOV

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH VERSE
WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

BY

E. L. VOYNICH

✓
LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

MCMXI

E. L. Voynich

*A dead voice called to me
From a rotting grave
In far Ruthenia,
The voice of a long-dead slave
In far Ruthenia;
Called to me bitterly,
Called me unceasingly,
From far Ruthenia.*

C. A. NICHOLSON.



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PREFACE

IT is with some diffidence that these attempts at translation are offered to the public. No reader can feel more acutely than myself how far they lag behind the originals. Especially do I feel it with regard to the six lyrics from Shevchénko, the peasant poet of the Ukraïna. To render adequately the haunting music of his Ruthenian tongue, one would need not merely the gift, but also the Border speech of the unknown poets who gave us "Helen of Kirkconnell" and "The Wife of Usher's Well."

I am so sensible of this that, had Shevchénko written in a language as accessible to most English readers as French or German, this volume would perhaps not have been published. But if a man leave immortal lyrics hidden away from Western Europe in a minor Slavonic idiom between Russian,

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PREFACE

Servian and Polish, it seems hard that he should go untranslated while waiting for the perfect rendering which may never come. Inadequate as are these few specimens, they show some dim shadow of the mind of a poet who has done for the Dnieper country what Burns did for Scotland.

My reason for adding a biographical sketch is that his work, though easily comprehensible to his countrymen, would be difficult for English readers to understand without some knowledge of the circumstances in which it was written.

As for Lérmontov and his masterpiece, they are both too well known to need any help from me. I include this version of the famous "Song of Kaláshnikov" because making it has given me so much pleasure that I hope others may find pleasure in reading it.

E. L. VOYNICH.

LONDON, 1911.

TARÁS SHEVCHÉNKO

TARÁS SHEVCHÉNKO was born in 1814, near the Dnieper, in a rural district of that Ruthenian Ukraïna (Borderland) which its Russian rulers call "Little Russia." His parents were agricultural serfs, the property of a half Russianized, half Polonized German named Engelhardt.

He lost his mother very early and his father a few years later. After the kind elder sister had left home, the younger children remained as undesired encumbrances in their stepmother's overcrowded cabin. She had been a widow with a family when the father married her; even had she meant kindly by the orphans, the food they ate would have been needed for her own half-starved children. Her feeling towards the obstinate and rebellious Tarás seems to have been little short of hatred. Once, apparently, she and her men lodgers came near to killing him in the process of extracting from him a confession of a petty theft which not he but her own son had committed. "I saw hell," he tells us of his childhood.

At an early age he was sent as pupil-apprentice to a *diachók* (parish clerk and sexton) who kept a village school. Beyond the alphabet and a few prayers the *diachók's* chief idea of education was to flog all the boys



every Saturday. The apprentice did all the house-work and was also used as a substitute, to gabble the burial service over the dead when the *diachók* was too drunk to get through it, and as a kind of *Smike* in the school. As he grew older, the weekly "execution" was deputed to him. This enabled him to extort food and coppers from boys smaller than himself. He also learned to steal from the neighbours.

After two years at the school he found the *diachók* one day alone and helplessly drunk, and seized the opportunity to "pay him back" with a savage mauling; after which he thought it prudent to run away, taking with him a stolen and long-coveted treasure, an illustrated book.

He now began to wander about the district, hiring himself out to do odd jobs, running away when too much beaten or starved, and always looking out for someone who could teach him to draw. The making of ikons and rude pictures to sell at village fairs had long been a local industry, and Tarás lived in the hope of becoming an ikon painter. At a cost of much patience and many punishments, he amassed a small hoard of stolen pencils, sheets of paper and "pictures" to copy; but he could not get anyone to teach him, and in time sheer hunger drove him back to his own village, Kirfilovka. Here he was set to mind sheep. His career as a shepherd soon ended abruptly and to the usual accompaniment of thrashing; he had forgotten the existence of the sheep, and they had strayed. Short as it was, however, it had played an important part in his life; it had brought him his first friend. She was a "little curly-headed girl"

named Oxána; she found him crying one day among the sheep, one of the poems tells us, and kissed him for sympathy. Then "the sun came out, and all the world was minc." He seems to have grown up with a notion of some day marrying her; and many years later, when a famous man, came back to the district and sought for her. But Oxána had "run off with the soldiers and gone to the bad," after the manner of curly-headed serf-girls.

At the age of fifteen he succeeded in finding an ikon painter who, after seeing him draw, offered to teach him without charge, demanding only that he should produce a permit from his owner, as it was a penal offence to harbour a runaway serf. He therefore tramped back to Kirfilovka, to ask the intendant of the estate for a permit.

The owner's son, a cavalry officer stationed in Poland, had asked the intendant to pick out the brightest boys on the estate, break them in to domestic service and forward them to him; the intendant therefore put Tarás into the kitchen of the manor-house to be trained for a cook.

He proved no better as a scullion than as a shepherd. At every opportunity he left the saucepans unscoured and slipped out of doors to draw. At last it occurred to the intendant that, as no amount of beating seemed to have any effect, it might be as well to turn the drawing to account. Tarás was accordingly sent to Poland with a report that he had been tried in the kitchen and found useless, but that he had a turn for drawing, and might, if trained, be set to decorate the house. Many wealthy landowners possessed serfs who had "a turn for" something or other, and found them quite useful. Captain

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the integrity of the financial system and for the ability to detect and prevent fraud. The text notes that without reliable records, it would be difficult to track the flow of funds and identify any irregularities.

2. The second part of the document outlines the specific requirements for record-keeping. It states that all transactions must be recorded in a clear and concise manner, using standardized formats and codes. This includes recording the date, amount, and nature of each transaction, as well as the names of the parties involved. The document also stresses the importance of maintaining original documents and providing copies to the appropriate authorities.

3. The third part of the document discusses the role of technology in record-keeping. It notes that the use of electronic systems can greatly improve the efficiency and accuracy of record-keeping. However, it also warns that the use of technology must be done in a secure and controlled manner to prevent data loss or unauthorized access. The document recommends that organizations should implement robust security measures and regularly update their systems to protect against emerging threats.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the importance of training and education in record-keeping. It states that all personnel involved in record-keeping should receive appropriate training and education to ensure they are up-to-date on the latest practices and regulations. This includes training on the use of record-keeping systems, as well as training on the legal and ethical implications of record-keeping. The document also recommends that organizations should provide ongoing education and training to their staff to ensure they remain knowledgeable and skilled in their roles.

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Engelhardt, however, did not want a decorator, so Tarás was provided with a suit of clothes and installed as page.

His work was to sit in the passage outside his master's door, and come in when called, to fill a pipe, find a pocket handkerchief or fetch slippers. In order that nothing might distract his attention, he was forbidden to read, sing or talk while on duty, and especially to draw at any time. Drawing was the unpardonable offence; so from time to time there were punishments for stealing candle-ends and drawing secretly by night. On one occasion the master, returning late from a ball, was kept waiting at the street door till someone got up to admit him. Coming in, he found the page who had been told to sit up for him too much absorbed in drawing to see or hear.

That time Captain Engelhardt was very angry, and the consequences will not bear detailed description; but they failed to cure Tarás of drawing. By the time he was eighteen, it was his master, not he, who had yielded. In Warsaw he was given a few drawing-lessons; then, when the Polish insurrection broke out, Captain Engelhardt retired from the service out of its way and settled in St. Petersburg; and there he apprenticed the boy to a painter and decorator named Shiryáyev.

The apprentice was to receive board, lodging and tuition; but the last item was a fiction. He was taught not decorative painting but house-painting; and was then hired out for Shiryáyev's benefit, as was the case with the three other apprentices, also serfs, whose sleeping-garret he shared.

A few years later, one of the students of the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, a Ruthenian named Sóschenko, walking in the Summer Garden on a fine night, saw a young peasant in a house-painter's dirty blouse, sitting with a piece of paper on his knee and trying to draw one of the statues. Noticing the lad's Ruthenian type, he spoke to him in his own language. Shevchénko acknowledged, after some pressing, that he was in the habit of coming to the park to draw, but only on clear nights or before sunrise, as he was at work by day and was also afraid to come when people were about. Sóschenko looked at the drawing, and invited him to call at his studio on the next holiday.

As much patient coaxing was needed to tame Shevchénko as if he had been some timid wild animal. On his first arrival at the studio, he began by trying to kiss the hand held out to him, that being the proper way to approach gentlefolk. When it was pulled away he turned and fled, convinced that he had somehow made the gentleman angry. Sóschenko searched for some days before finding him again, and had much difficulty in persuading him to come back. Bribes of books, pencils and especially candles by which to read or draw in the garret at night when the others were asleep, proved more efficacious than any assurances of goodwill. In time he was won over to spend all his spare moments at the studio, and even left off running away in a panic whenever a visitor came.

On holidays he now sat at table with artists and men of letters, read the books they lent him, learned drawing,

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looked at pictures and listened to theoretical discussions. At all other times he was Engelhardt's serf and Shiryáyev's bond-labourer, sharing a dirty garret with other serfs and liable to a serf's punishments if he failed to give satisfaction. The effect on his mind of this double existence was such that his friends began to fear he would end it by suicide unless something could be done.

Professor Briulov, the director of the Academy of Arts, had taken an interest in him for some time, at first because he had "not got a serf's face" and later because of the drawings. He promised that an Academy scholarship should be granted if Engelhardt could be induced to waive his right of ownership.

The average price of a young male serf was not formidably high, but Engelhardt had already realized the usefulness of "a turn for drawing," having more than once had portraits of his mistresses painted by Shevchenko, whom he had tipped at the rate of a rouble for each portrait. Moreover Professor Briulov, who first approached Engelhardt, made the initial mistake of appealing to this middle-aged man about town, on grounds of humanity, to take his own view of the case. When he had returned home, raging against the "amphibious beast in slippers" who had merely laughed at him, the friend who succeeded him, asking: "How much will you take?" was given to understand that people seemed to think this young man a genius, and if you want geniuses you have to pay for them. "It's not a question of philanthropy," Engelhardt is reported as saying; "it's a question of money. My price is 2,500 roubles."

From Shevchenko's point of view it might as well have been two and a half millions; but his friends were less easily discouraged. The money was finally raised by means of a raffle for a picture which Briulov had painted for the purpose, and paid to Engelhardt on the 22nd of April 1838. We are told that it was found useless to explain any details to Shevchenko; "he would do nothing but kiss the paper and sob."

During the first few months of his life as an art-student he seems to have had his head a little turned by the curiosity which his story aroused in St. Petersburg. Fashionable ladies wanted to see the interesting savage, who, for a short time, took to going out in the evening, neglected his work and even quarrelled with Soshenko, the person to whom he owed most, over some silly and apparently rather discreditable love affair. He soon recovered his senses; but the drawing now took a second place. As Soshenko expressed it, he had begun to "waste his time on scribbling verses."

So far as is known, the tendency to "scribble" never woke in him till after he had seen Engelhardt's signature to the emancipation paper. Whether his friend's disappointment with his Academy work had any justification or not, the work was good enough to win several prizes and enable him to earn a modest living by drawing for commissions during the greater part of his student life.

The first little volume of poems appeared in 1840, the second in 1842. They were received with passionate enthusiasm in Kiev and the whole Ukraine, but with



chilling contempt in St. Petersburg. Russian critics had not yet discovered that Ruthenian is an independent and singularly beautiful language, possessing a glorious folk-literature. It was a jargon spoken by common peasants, and to write verse in it was absurd. Shevchénko took their censure bitterly to heart, and, with characteristic deference to the commands of gentlefolk, tried his hand at writing in Russian; naturally without success.

In 1843 he went back to the Ukraïna for a holiday. This time it was not patronage, but lionizing, which for a moment threatened his stability. Dragged from one country house to another and surrounded by celebrity hunters, many of whom were idle and drunken, he too began to drink. Luckily for him, one of the great ladies of the country, Princess Varvára Répnina, was a sensible woman who soon gained much influence over him. She mothered him affectionately and seems to have quickly made him ashamed of the set and habits into which he was falling. He pulled up and went back to work.

More verses followed; and in 1845 he received his diploma, left the Academy and set up as a portrait-painter. In the same year he was appointed art expert to the Kiev Archaeological Commission. He now began to think of settling in Kiev, where he was idolized by the university students. Meanwhile, on a holiday visit to his native district, he fell in love with the daughter of an old priest whose servant he had once been when a child. The parents refused to give her to a common serf boy. It was useless to explain to them that his social status had altered; his fame, his comfortable income, his aristocratic

friends were all unavailing. He might be a celebrity in Kiev and St. Petersburg; at Kirillovka he was just Tarás. Their veto was immovable and the engagement was broken off; apparently against the girl's wish, for she refused all other offers and died unmarried.

At the beginning of 1847 he was appointed Art Lecturer to Kiev University. Immediately afterwards he, his friend the historian Kostomárov and many other persons were arrested on a charge of belonging to a seditious body called "The Brotherhood of SS. Cyril and Methodius."

Shevchénko denied membership, and the police, on investigation, withdrew the charge. As for the society, which Kostomárov had started among the university students, it was seditious to the extent of advocating religious liberty, popular education, the abolition of serfdom, of corporal punishment and of the death penalty, and the ultimate federation of all Slavonic peoples; but the official police report acquits it of any more "revolutionary aims" than "to found schools and to publish books for the poor."

Shevchénko, the report continues, though not a member of the society, was "actuated by his own vicious tendencies." He had "composed in the Little Russian tongue verses of a most abominable character," which might set people dreaming; and had shown "boundless impudence." . . . "The extraordinary respect felt by all Ukrainian Slavists both for Shevchénko personally and for his poems," and his "reputation as a famous Little Russian writer" might make his verses "doubly harmful



and dangerous," so he "must be regarded as one of the more important offenders."

The other prisoners were sentenced to detention in fortresses for various terms; Shevchénko, "in consideration of his robust constitution," to military service in the Orenburg "special" (disciplinary) brigade; his poems to be withdrawn from circulation and measures to be taken to ensure his having no further opportunity to draw, paint or compose any more "abominable and scurrilous" verses. His unpublished poems, left in the charge of a friend, were placed by her in a box and buried in the earth to save them from the police. Some years later the box was dug up and the manuscripts were lost or destroyed. All that is known of them is that they belonged to his finest period.

During his first three years of military penal servitude (one at Orsk, where he was attacked by scurvy, one in a fortress near the Aral Lake and one at Orenburg), he was placed under commanders who showed him as much kindness as their orders permitted and allowed him to correspond with his friends. They reported his conduct as in every way satisfactory, and suggested promotion. For some time they not only winked at his possessing drawing materials, but even made the preparation of drawings for an official publication of the War Ministry a part of his work, and associated with him in the task a Polish political prisoner, Bronislaw Zaléski.

Being provided with a little money, he succeeded in protecting himself from physical violence, though not from threats of it, by bribing with drink and delicacies

the drill-sergeants and some of the officers. One of the latter, having "borrowed" sixty-eight roubles, threatened him with punishment when he asked for the return of the loan.

Others officers treated him as an equal and let him take refuge in their quarters from the noise, vermin and conversation of the barracks. "Imagine," he writes to Princess Varvára, after an evening spent in an officer's rooms, "it was worse than the barracks. And these people—God have mercy on them—have pretensions to education and decent manners . . . God! Am I going to grow like them? . . ."

His petitions and that of Princess Varvára, to the authorities at St. Petersburg, that he might be allowed to paint landscape or portraits, remained fruitless. "I call Almighty God to witness," one petition runs, "that I have never made a seditious drawing in my life . . ."

Nevertheless he did draw. At Orenburg the commander, Óbruchev, allowed him to sleep out of barracks; and a Polish resident in the town, though personally a stranger to him, made him welcome in his house and kept not only painting materials but civilian dress at his disposal.

In 1850 an officer sent in a report that private Shevchénko was writing verses, painting portraits and wearing civilian dress. A search was made and he was found in the possession of private letters, a Bible, Shakespeare, the Imitation of Christ, Lermontov, Púshkin and other Russian classics, a box of paints, portfolios for drawings, and civilian clothing. A report was sent to the Emperor



Nicholas, by whose personal wish the writing and drawing had been forbidden. He replied commanding that the offender should be kept under strict arrest while his immediate superiors "answered before the law" for their slackness in permitting him to draw.

The investigation was conducted by the St. Petersburg Third Section and Chief of Gendarmerie, who found that private Shevchénko was guilty of disobeying the Imperial prohibition to write and draw, but that there was "no offence" in the character of the verses and drawings seized. He was therefore only transferred to the fortress of Novopetróvsk, in the Caspian salt-desert, special instructions being forwarded with him, that he was on no account to be allowed paper, pencils, pens or ink. During the seven years of his life there he produced, so far as is known, no verses.

Shortly after his arrival he wrote to Princess Varvára: "My superiors are indulgent; my health is good . . ." She did not answer. Letters from her had been found at the search, and she had received from a high official the following intimation: "Your correspondence with Shevchénko, and the fact that you formerly wrote to me pleading for alleviations of the lot of the said private, prove you to have taken in him an interest of a vicious, disgraceful and unseemly nature . . . Your Excellency will do well, in future, to occupy yourself less with the affairs of Little Russia, otherwise . . ."

Receiving no more letters, either from her or from another friend who had also been threatened with "consequences," Shevchénko came in time to the conclusion

that they had forgotten him. For eighteen months none of his friends had any news of him; then occasional letters reached them. In 1852 he writes: ". . . Sand and stones . . . If there were any grass, or a tree . . . I was born a slave, and it seems I shall die a private. I wish it would end somehow—anyhow; I am getting tired of it." In 1853: "I am a beggar in the true sense; not only in material things . . . my heart is beggared. If you could see the people that surround me . . . they crush me, crush me . . . I must bow and scrape, or they may squash me altogether, like a louse, between their fingernails."

One of the officers in the fortress mentioned afterwards the special zest with which the drunken Captain Potáпов, under whose immediate command Shevchénko was placed for some time, would set on the non-commissioned officers to "chivy" him and search him for pencils, and at drill would hold him up to public ridicule for clumsiness, for keeping his eyes down, for answering in a low voice, for looking unhappy. It is true that in the Russian army this last constitutes a breach of discipline, since: "Look cheerful" is an official word of command.

The first manifesto of Alexander II was accompanied by an amnesty, but Shevchénko was not included in it and was told so a year later. Meanwhile Countess Tolstáya had begun to agitate on his behalf. She had never met him, but had read his poems.

He wrote to her in 1856: "One more year, and I am lost . . ."

Another letter to a friend (1856) says: ". . . When I



was transferred, I picked up on the road a willow twig, brought it here and stuck it into the earth in the garrison kitchen garden. I watered it, and now it is tall and thick. I am going to draw it, of course secretly . . . It reminds me of the legend of the repentant brigand . . . He came with his iron-bound club and asked to be shriven . . . but his sins were great and dreadful. The hermit . . . took him up on to a hill, stuck the club into the ground and told him to carry up water in his mouth . . . "Then shall thy sins be forgiven, when from this instrument of death shall grow a tree and shall bear fruit." . . . Years passed . . . One day the hermit, in meditation, wandered up the hill . . . On the top . . . was a magnificent pear-tree covered with ripe fruit, and under the tree sat an old man with a beard down to his feet . . . My willow has grown . . . and still, and still, my sins are not forgiven. But he was only a brigand, and I, alas, was a poet."

"Just as ten years ago," he writes of the arrival of a certain major to inspect the garrison, "he examined us; word for word the same.

"What are you here for?"

"For stealing Government money, your Honour."

"I hope, in future. . . . And you?"

"For composing abominable verses, your Honour."

"I hope, in future . . ."

"Just as ten years ago . . ."

Countess Tolstáya met with one rebuff after another, and the coronation amnesty also was issued without Shevchénko's name. After that he took to drinking.

In 1857 the Emperor consented to his release, and in

the summer he started for St. Petersburg at the invitation of the Tolstoy family. On the way he was re-arrested at Nizhny-Novgorod. It turned out to be only a question of a dispute between officials about the permit papers, but he was kept waiting some months for them at Nizhny-Novgorod. While there he made a formal proposal to the parents of a young actress whom he had met, for her hand in marriage; but the girl ran out of the house, thinking him mad, and the parents shut their doors in his face. The result was another drinking bout.

In the spring of 1858 he was allowed to go to the Tolstoys at St. Petersburg. They found him both mentally and physically wrecked. Drink had taken possession of him, scurvy had devoured his body and his mind revolved dully round certain fixed points. He still wished to write; but, though he succeeded in re-editing some of his old work, the new attempts were mostly poor stuff, and often either in Russian or in some unknown bastard jargon between Russian and Ruthenian. Turgényev, who met him at the Academy of Arts and tried to make friends with him, says: "We literary men . . . received him with friendly sympathy . . . But he was cautious and would scarcely ever open out to anyone; he had a trick of slipping past sideways . . . One seldom saw anything poetical in him; he seemed rough and hardened." Again: "There were traces of the private about him; the expression of his eyes was mostly sullen and suspicious, but once in a way there was a . . . delightful smile."

He made an attempt to settle in the Ukraïna; but was re-arrested, and though released at once, is said to have

received an official hint that he had better keep out of the country. The short remainder of his life was spent in St. Petersburg. Having lost, from long disuse, the power of painting, he worked for a living as an engraver, and filled part of his spare time by writing elementary school-books for Ruthenian peasant children. One, an alphabet, was published; the history, geography and arithmetic primers were still unfinished at his death.

The rest of his time was divided between efforts to obtain the liberation of his brothers and sister, who were still serfs; bouts of drinking; a certain amount of social life; and a series of unsuccessful attempts to get married. He does not seem to have felt any very particular interest in one girl rather than in another; but he was haunted by the terror of dying alone, and passionately begged his friends to "find him a wife." She must be a Ruthenian, a peasant who would not despise him ("What would a lady do in my little place?") and by preference she should be an orphan, and friendless. Apparently he had a dim notion of making some poor girl happy in return for protection against the ever-present nightmare of a solitary death. One such girl refused with horror ("But he's so old, and bald, and gray . . .!"); another, a St. Petersburg maidservant, accepted him, apparently for the sake of the presents he brought her, but openly laughed at him behind his back. To the relief of his friends the marriage was broken off at the last moment. "What am I to do with myself?" he says in a letter to a friend. "I shall go mad here, alone in a foreign land . . ."

By the end of 1860 it was clear that he was dying. He

held on to life in the hope of seeing the emancipation of the serfs, which had already been promised. The edict was to have been issued on the 19th of Feb., 1861, but when the day came there was no edict, and on the 26th he died. On the 5th of March the emancipation was proclaimed, and a few weeks later his friends received permission to take his body to the Ukraïna and bury it beside the Dnieper.

The lost gift had come back towards the end. "Winter," one of his finest poems, was written a month before his death.

How far the limitations of Shevchénko's mind were the result of his circumstances and how far inherent, it would be difficult to say. Certain fixed prejudices of his race and class might perhaps have disappeared in a wider life; in the barracks they grew more rigid with years. He seems to have recognized only two kinds of persons in the world: "God's people," who do all the hard work and sing all the lovely songs, and the wicked privileged classes who prey upon and maltreat them. The Poles whom a Ruthenian peasant meets are chiefly of the provincial land-owning class and often selfish and reactionary; therefore all Poles are hard landlords and oppressors of the poor, and their language is "gentlefolk's talk." Jewish moneylenders and drinkshop-keepers have caused untold misery in Ruthenian villages; therefore all Jews are bloodsuckers. Russian rule he had seen and felt; therefore all Russians are monsters. Individuals who had shown him personal kindness or affection were surprising exceptions, and even them he could never quite trust.



His convictions are as immovable as those of a seventeenth century Anabaptist.

As for his unrealized personal ambitions, he has given us a list of them.

"I asked such little things of God," one of the lyrics says: a hut by the Dnieper, where he could live with "my poor girl," Oxána, and sing folk-songs in the evening after the day's work; a bit of land to cultivate, a patch of garden ground, two poplar trees of his own; and to die by the Dnieper and be buried on "Such a tiny little hill . . ."

SIX LYRICS FROM THE RUTHENIAN
OF TARÁS SHEVCHÉNKO

I

(Written shortly before his arrest.)

FROM day to day, from night to night
My summer passes; autumn creeps
Nearer; before mine eyes the light
Fades out; my soul is blind and sleeps.
Everything sleeps; and I? I ponder:
Do I yet live, or do I wander,
A dead thing, through my term of years,
As void of laughter as of tears?

Come to me, my fate! Where art thou?
Oh, I have no fate.
God, if Thou dost scorn to love me,
Grant me but Thy hate!

1900

1900

LYRICS

Only let my heart not wither
 Slowly, day by day,
 Useless as a fallen tree-trunk
 Rotting by the way.
 Let me live, and live in spirit
 Loving all mankind;
 Or, if not, then let my curses
 Strike the sunlight blind.
 Wretched is the fettered captive,
 Dying, and a slave;
 But more wretched he that, living,
 Sleeps, as in a grave,
 Till he falls asleep for ever,
 Leaving not a sign
 That there faded into darkness
 Something once divine.

Come to me, my fate! Where art thou?
 Oh, I have no fate.
 God, if Thou dost scorn to love me,
 Grant me but Thy hate!

LYRICS

II

(Written the first year in the disciplinary brigade.)

ONLY friend, clear evening twilight,
 Come and talk to me!
 Cross the hills to share my prison
 Very secretly.
 Tell me how the sun in splendour
 Sets behind the hill;
 How the Dnieper lasses carry
 Pitchers down to fill;
 How the broad-leaved sycamore
 Flings his branches wide;
 How the willow kneels to pray
 By the river-side;
 How her green boughs kiss the water
 Trailing, half asleep,
 And unchristened ghosts of babies
 Swing from them and weep;
 How lost souls at lonely cross-roads



LYRICS

Cower, wild and dumb,
 When the owl shrieks from the alder
 Of the wrath to come;
 How the magic flowers open
 At the moonbeam's touch. . . .
 But of men, what would you tell me,—
 Me, who know so much?
 Far too much! And you know nothing;
 Why, you understand
 Nothing of what men are doing
 Now, in my dear land.
 But I know, and I will tell you,
 Tell you, without end. . . .
 When you speak with God to-morrow,
 Look you tell Him, friend.

LYRICS

III

THE REAPER

(Written in the disciplinary brigade, first or second year.)

THROUGH the fields the reaper goes
 Piling sheaves on sheaves in rows;
 Hills, not sheaves, are these.
 Where he passes howls the earth,
 Howl the echoing seas.

All the night the reaper reaps,
 Never stays his hand nor sleeps,
 Reaping endlessly;
 Whets his blade and passes on. . . .
 Hush, and let him be.

Hush, he cares not how men writhe
 With naked hands against the scythe.
 Wouldst thou hide in field or town?
 Where thou art, there he will come;
 He will reap thee down.



LYRICS

Serf and landlord, great and small;
 Friendless wandering singer,—all,
 All shall swell the sheaves that grow
 To mountains; even the Tzar shall go.¹

And me too the scythe shall find
 Cowering alone behind
 Bars of iron; swift and blind,
 Strike, and pass, and leave me, stark
 And forgotten in the dark.

¹ Change of metre as in original.

LYRICS

IV

Written in the disciplinary brigade, first or second year.)

DIG my grave and raise my barrow
 By the Dnieper-side
 In Ukráina, my own land,
 A fair land and wide.
 I will lie and watch the cornfields,
 Listen through the years
 To the river voices roaring,
 Roaring in my ears.

When I hear the call
 Of the racing flood,
 Loud with hated blood,
 I will leave them all,
 Fields and hills; and force my way
 Right up to the Throne



LYRICS

Where God sits alone;
 Clasp His feet, and pray . . .
 But till that day
 What is God to me?

Bury me, be done with me,
 Rise and break your chain,
 Water your new liberty
 With blood for rain.
 Then, in the mighty family
 Of all men that are free,
 May be, sometimes, very softly
 You will speak of me?

LYRICS

V

*(So far as is known, the last thing written in the disciplinary brigades
 third year. There are no verses and few letters
 for the next seven years.)*

I CARE not, shall I see my dear
 Own land before I die, or no,
 Nor who forgets me, buried here
 In desert wastes of alien snow;
 Though all forget me,—better so.

A slave from my first bitter years,
 Most surely I shall die a slave
 Ungraced of any kinsmen's tears;
 And carry with me to my grave
 Everything; and leave no trace,
 No little mark to keep my place
 In the dear lost Ukraïna
 Which is not ours, though our land.



And none shall ever understand;
 No father to his son shall say:
 —Kneel down, and fold your hands, and pray;
 He died for our Ukraïna.

I care no longer if the child
 Shall pray for me, or pass me by.
 One only thing I cannot bear:
 To know my land, that was beguiled
 Into a death-trap with a lie,
 Trampled and ruined and defiled . .
 Ah, but I care, dear God; I care!

VI

WINTER

(Written in exile in Russia about a month before his death.)

Thy youth is over; time has brought
 Winter upon thee; hope is grown
 Chill as the north wind; thou art old.
 Sit thou in thy dark house alone;
 With no man converse shalt thou hold,
 With no man shalt take counsel; nought
 Nought art thou, nought be thy desire.
 Sit still alone by thy dead fire
 Till hope shall mock thee, fool, again,
 Blinding thine eyes with frosty gleams,
 Vexing thy soul with dreams, with dreams
 Like snowflakes in the empty plain.
 Sit thou alone, alone and dumb;
 Cry not for Spring, it will not come.

LYRICS

It will not enter at thy door,
Nor make thy garden green once more,
Nor cheer with hope thy withered age,
Nor loose thy spirit from her cage . . .
Sit still, sit still! Thy life is spent;
Nought art thou, be with nought content.

THE SONG OF THE MERCHANT
KALÁSHNIKOV

FROM THE RUSSIAN OF MIKHAÍL
LÉRMONTOV



A SONG OF THE TZAR IVÁN VASÍLYEVICH,
OF THE YOUNG OPRÍCHNIK,
AND OF THE BOLD MERCHANT
KALÁSHNIKOV

Now all hail to thee, Tzar Iván Vasílyevich!
Of thee and of thine have we made our song,
Of the young opríchnik thou dearly lovedst,
Of the merchant, the bold Kaláshnikov.
We fashioned it after the ancient way,
We sang it in tune to the dulcimer's sound,
We chanted it loudly that all men might hear.
And the orthodox folk took delight in our song;
The boyárin Matvyéy Romodánovski
Brought to us foaming mead in a goblet,
And his young boyárinya, fair of countenance,
Offered to us on a platter of silver



A new towel with silken broideries.
 Three days and three nights have they feasted us,
 And hearkened, and are not weary of hearing.

I

Oh, is it the bright sun that shineth in heaven,
 And are they the clouds that draw light from his face?
 Nay, here sitteth at meat the golden crownéd,
 The terrible Tzar Iván Vasílyevich.
 Together behind him the cup-bearers stand,
 Before his face the boyáre and princes,
 And around him all the opríchniki.
 So feasteth the Tzar, to the glory of God,
 To his own exceeding comfort and joy.

Then, smiling, the Tzar gave command to his servants,
 That they fill to the brim his golden cup
 With the sweet red wine from over the sea,
 And bear it round to all the opríchniki;
 And they drank, and rejoicéd, and praiséd the Tzar.

But one alone of all the opríchniki,
 A bold fighter and dreadful in battle,

Never wetted his beard in the golden cup.
 On the earth his gloomy eyes were fixed
 And his head sank down on his mighty chest,
 And the thought in his heart was a bitter thought.

Then the Tzar drew his black brows together in wrath,
 And he turned his gaze upon the opríchnik;
 So looketh the hawk from heaven's blue height
 On the tender wings of the turtle-dove;
 Yet the warrior lifted not his eyes.
 Then the Tzar struck his staff upon the ground,
 That its point of iron was driven down
 Full three inches deep through the oaken floor;
 Yet the warrior started not, nor moved.
 Then thus spake the Tzar, a terrible word,
 And the young man roused him out of his dream.
 "Thou, our faithful servant, Kiribyévich!
 Dost thou hide in thy soul an evil intent?
 Dost thou envy thy master his glory?
 Or say, is our service so heavy a burden?
 All the star-folk are glad when the moon appeareth,
 That the pathways of heaven are bright to their feet;
 But if any star hideth her face in a cloud



She falleth headlong from heaven to earth.
 Ill beseemeth it thee, Kiribyévich,
 Thus to carp and to frown at the joy of thy lord;
 Thou, that wast born of the race of Skurátov,³
 Thou, that wast bred in the house of Maliúta!"

Then answereth thus Kiribyévich,
 Bowing lowly before the terrible Tzar:
 "Oh master and lord, Iván Vasílyevich!
 Be not angered against thine unworthy slave,
 For sweet wine shall not quench a burning heart,
 Nor yet may it lull black sorrow to sleep.
 But if thou be wroth, is thy will not as fate?
 Nay, strike off my head, if it please thee so;
 It weighs on my shoulders, broad though they be,
 And gladly in truth will I lay it down."

Then said unto him Iván Vasílyevich:
 "Oh young gallant, what cause to lament thee hast thou?
 I doubt me thy gold-broidered mantle is worn,
 Or the moth has devoured thy sable-furs,
 Or thy purse is empty, thy money all spent.
 Hast thou found a fault in thy keen sword-edge?"

Is thy horse ill-shod? Has he fallen lame?
 Or hast thou been thrown, hast thou suffered defeat
 In the boxing-match, from a merchant's son?"

Then answereth thus Kiribyévich,
 Shaking his head with the curling locks:
 "Not yet hath been born the man that shall throw me,
 Whether merchant he be, or of noble house.
 Merrily goeth my horse in his pride;
 Shineth as glass the keen edge of my sword;
 And on holidays, thanks to thy graciousness,
 I can deck me as gay as another.

"When I ride through the town on my prancing horse,
 By the Moscow river where all may see,
 With my silken girdle about me tied
 And my cap of samite set a-tilt,
 Bordered with sable black and rare;
 At the wooden gates of the houses stand
 All the young maidens and wedded wives,
 Look and wonder and whisper together.
 One alone never looketh, nor turneth her head,
 But hideth her face in her silken veil.



"Though thou seek throughout our mother, holy Russia,
 Another one shalt thou not find so fair;
 Moveth stately, as a gliding swan,
 Gazeth sweetly, as a brooding dove,
 Speaketh—'tis as sings the nightingale.
 Brightly burns the red upon her cheeks,
 Like unto the dawn in God's clear heaven;
 And the sunny tresses, golden gleaming,
 Meetly bound with many-coloured ribbons,
 Waving, twining, float across her shoulders,
 Curl and kiss upon her bosom white.
 For her birth, she cometh of a merchant's household,
 And her name is Alyóna Dmítrevna.

"My heart is dust when I see her face;
 All the might goeth out from my strong sword-arm,
 And mine eyes are dimmed as with shadows of even;
 Right sorrowful am I, most orthodox Tzar,
 And alone, alone in the world so wide.
 I am weary of swift-footed horses,
 I am weary of silk and of samite,
 And I care not at all for treasure of gold.
 With whom, with whom shall I share my wealth?

Before whom shall I show my horsemanship?
 And to whom shall I boast of my brave attire?
 Let me go to the desert Volga lands,
 To the open waste where the Cossacks dwell;
 There death shall bring peace to my restless heart,
 Even death at the point of an infidel's lance.
 And the cruel Tartars shall share together
 My keen-edged sword and my faithful steed
 And his trappings of rare Circassian work.
 The ravens shall drink the tears from mine eyes,
 And my bones shall bleach in the autumn rains;
 Without mass or dirge mine unhappy dust
 Shall be scattered abroad to the winds of heaven."

Then answered, laughing, Iván Vasílyevich:
 —"Nay, rather than this, my faithful servant,
 Will I seek for a means that shall ease thy grief.
 Now take thou therefore my jacinth ring,
 And take thou this collar of orient pearls;
 To the prudent matchmaker bow thee low,
 And send these gifts of precious worth
 To thy fair Alyóna Dmítrevna.



A SONG

If she favour thy suit, call the wedding feast;
And if not, then console thee as best thou mayst."

Now all hail to thee, Tzar Iván Vasílyevich!
But thy wily slave hath deceived thee;
Hath not told thee truth and verity.
Thou knowest not that this woman so fair
Is a married wife, in wedlock bound
To a merchant, in God's most holy church,
By the sacred law of Christian men.

Hey, merry minstrels, sing, but tune each sounding string!
Hey, merry minstrels, drink, let the foaming goblets clink!
Do all honour to the virtuous boyárin,
And his young boyárinya, fair of countenance!

II

In the busy bazaar the young merchant sitteth,
The bold gallant Stepán Paramónovich,
Called by the name of Kaláshnikov.
All around him he spreadeth his silken wares;
With fair speech he enticeth the strangers to enter,
Telling with care the gold and silver coins.

A SONG

But an evil day is this day to him;
All the rich boyáre pass his booth and turn not,
Enter not to chaffer and to buy.

Now in the holy churches the bells have rung for vespers
Red the misty sunset burns above the Kremlin;
Clouds rush out, and swift across the heavens
Flee before the anger of the shouting storm-wind;
Empty and deserted is the wide bazaar.
Now Stepán Paramónovich closeth up
The oaken door, and maketh it fast
With a lock of cunning workmanship;
And hard by the door, with an iron chain,
He bindeth the watchdog faithful and grim;
Then sadly and soberly goeth he home
To his fair young wife, by the river-side.

Now cometh he into his lofty house,
And amazement seizeth Stepán Paramónovich:
His young wife standeth not in the doorway to greet him
On the oaken table no cloth is spread
And the lamp by the holy shrine burns dim.
Then calls he aloud to the old serving-woman:



A SONG

“How, now, what is this, Yeremyéyevna?
 Now tell me whither is gone so late,
 So late in the night Alyóna Dmítrevna?
 And what of my little children dear?
 Without doubt they have gambolled and played their fill,
 And weary have laid them early to sleep?”

“Oh master mine, Stepán Paramónovich!
 I will tell unto thee a marvellous thing:
 To the vespers went Alyóna Dmítrevna;
 Now the priest with his young bride hath passed by the
 door,

Bright shineth the lamp where they sit at meat;
 And yet all this while my mistress, thy wife,
 Returneth not home from the parish church.
 And the little children thou lovest well
 Have not gambolled nor played, nor in sleep are laid,
 But weep, and weep, and will not be comforted.”

Now a bitter thought taketh hold on the heart
 Of the brave young merchant Kaláshnikov;
 Now standeth he gazing out on the street,
 And black night looketh in at the window;

A SONG

And the white snow, falling, filleth the way,
 Hiding the tracks of the feet of men.

Now he heareth the sound of a closing door,
 And the footsteps of one that is sore in haste.
 Now he turneth him round,—by the holy rood!
 In the doorway standeth his fair young wife,
 White as a spectre, with head uncovered;³
 Loose on her shoulders the flaxen tresses,
 All tangled and scattered with melting snowflakes;
 Wide her eyes, that stare, bereft of understanding,
 Open mouth that whispereth of things unknown.

“My wife, my wife, where hast thou been wandering?
 In what house, in what shameful place of the street,
 That thy locks are uncovered to all men’s eyes,
 That thus thy garments are soiled and torn?
 As a harlot thou comest from feasting, I trow,
 With the lewd young sons of the proud boyáre.
 Not for this, my wife, in God’s holy church
 Did we kneel for the solemn marriage blessing;
 Not for this wert thou wed with my golden ring.
 I will shut thee away behind bars and bolts,



A SONG

Behind iron gratings and oaken doors;
Thou shalt see no more the sweet light of day,
Lest thou bring disgrace on mine honest name!"

And hearing these words, Alyóna Dmítrevna
Fell to trembling and shaking, my golden dove,
Quivered, as quiver the leaves of the aspen;
Bitterly, bitterly weeping she cast her
Prone on the floor, and lay at his feet.

"Bright sun of my life, thou my master and lord,
Either slay me this night or hearken to me!
Keen are thy words as a two-edged knife
That cutteth the core of my heart in twain.
Little fear have I of the torments of death,
Neither fear I the cruel tongues of men,
But I fear, I fear thine anger, my lord.

"Even now I came from the vespers home
In the twilight alone, in the lonely street;
And methought that I heard the snow rustle behind:—
I looked back,—'twas a man running swift as the wind.
Then I felt my legs beneath me fail,

A SONG

And I covered my face with my silken veil.
Now he caught my hands with a grasp of might,
And softly he whispered thus in mine ear:
'Fair woman, why tremblest thou? What shouldst thou
fear?

No brigand am I, no thief of the night;
Nay, I serve the terrible Tzar himself.
For my name, it is Kiribyévich,
And I come of the glorious house of Maliúta.'

"Oh then did I count me for lost indeed,
And mine ears were filled as with roaring of waters;
And then began he to kiss and embrace me
And, kissing, murmured and murmured again:
'Answer me, tell me what thing thou desirest,
My beloved, my sweetest, my fairest one!
Wouldst thou gold, or pearls from the orient seas?
Wouldst thou flashing jewels, or silver brocade?
As a princess, so will I trick thee out
That all thy neighbours shall envy thee.
Only let me not perish of bitter despite;
Ah, have pity and love me, embrace me but once
Nay only this once, ere I leave thee!'



A SONG

“And he crushed me against him, and kissed me again;
 Even now I can feel them scorching my cheek,
 Burning as burneth the fire of hell,
 The accursed kisses he planted there.
 And the cruel neighbours looked out at their gateways
 Laughing, and pointing at us with their fingers.

“When I tore me out of his grip at last
 And ran headlong home to escape from him,
 In my flight I left in the brigand's hands
 My broidered kerchief, thy gift to me,
 And my silken veil of Bokhara work.
 He hath shamed me, he hath dishonoured me,
 Me, a pure woman, undefiled . . .
 And what will the cruel neighbours say?
 And before whose eyes dare I show me now?

“Give me not up, thy true and faithful wife,
 To evil-doers for a mockery!
 In whom but in thee can I put my trust?
 Unto whom but thee shall I turn for help?
 In all the wide world an orphan am I;
 My father lies under the churchyard mould

A SONG

And beside him sleepeth my mother dear;
 And mine elder brother, thou knowest well,
 Is long lost to our sight in far-off lands;
 And my younger brother is but a child,
 But a little child, understanding nought!”

Thus pleaded with him Alyóna Dmítrevna,
 Weeping and wailing, lamenting bitterly.

Now Stepán Paramónovich sendeth word
 That his two younger brothers should come in haste.
 Then came the two brothers, and bowed them low,
 And these be the words that they spake unto him:
 “Our eldest brother, now tell us, we pray,
 What thing may it be, that hath chanced to thee,
 That thou sendest for us in the night so dark,
 In the night so dark, in the frost and snow?”
 “I will tell you true, oh my brothers dear,
 That an evil thing hath chanced to me;
 That the Tzar's oprfchník, the false Kiribyévich,
 Hath defiled our honourable house.
 And a wrong such as this shall the heart not bear,
 Nor the soul of a brave man suffer and live.



Now to-morrow shall be the great boxing-match
 By the river-side, in the Tzar's own sight,
 Then will I go out against the oprichnik.
 I will fight to the death, to the uttermost;
 Should it chance that he slay me, do you come forth
 To defend our holy mother the right.
 Have no fear, oh belovéd brothers mine;
 You are younger than I, you are strong in your youth,
 Fewer sins can have spotted your souls as yet,
 So it may be that God shall have mercy on you."

Then answered the brothers and spake unto him:
 "Where the wind blows under the heaven's vault,
 There the clouds in obedience fulfil his commands.
 When the gray eagle calls with a mighty voice
 To the banquet of death, to the feast of blood,
 To devour the slain on the battle-plain,
 The young eaglets come flocking in answer.
 Our eldest art thou, in our father's place;
 Do thou as thou wilt, as it seemeth thee good,
 And we will not forsake thee, our flesh and our blood."

Hey, merry minstrels, sing, but tune each sounding string!
 Hey, merry minstrels, drink, let the foaming goblets clink!
 Do all honour to the virtuous boyárin,
 And his young boyárinya, fair of countenance!

III

Over great Moscow, golden-domed and mighty,
 Over the marble Kremlin wall;
 From beyond the far forests, beyond the blue hills;
 Along the raftered house-roofs glimmering,
 Chasing the pale clouds grayly shimmering,
 Behold, ariseth now the fiery dawn.
 Her yellow locks are flung across the heavens,
 She bathes in scattered snow-flakes glittering;
 Even as a maiden gazing on her mirrör,
 She looketh laughing into God's clear sky.
 Thou scarlet sunrise, why hast thou awakened?
 For what delight art thou become so fair?

Now are they gathered together all,
 All the young gallants of Moscow town,
 By the river-side, to the boxing-match,
 Proud and glad for the holiday.



And the Tzar himself is come hither in state;
 With boyáre he comes, with opríchniki.
 And before him stretcheth the silver chain,
 And its links are clamped with the good red gold.
 For fifty paces the ring is staked
 For the single combat, the boxing-match.
 And now the Tzar Iván Vasílyevich
 Commandeth to shout with a mighty voice:
 "Oh where are you all, brave lads and true?
 Come show your strength to our father the Tzar;
 Come out, come out to the ring so wide!
 The Tzar to the conqueror gifts shall give,
 And him that is conquered shall God forgive."

Now first cometh forward the bold Kiribyévich;
 Silent he bows him before the Tzar,
 Flings from his shoulders the mantle of samite,
 Stands with his right arm proudly akimbo
 While his left hand toys with his scarlet cap;
 Thus he awaiteth an adversary.
 Three times have the heralds shouted aloud,
 Yet never a gallant comes out to the combat;
 They stand, and whisper, and nudge one another.

To and fro in the ring the opríchnik strideth
 Mocking and flouting the craven boxers.
 "Aha, they are silent, grown tame on a sudden!
 Nay, gallants, take heart! for the holiday's sake
 I swear I will leave you your lives to repent in,
 I will but make sport for our father the Tzar."

And behold, the crowd parteth to left and to right,
 And Stepán Paramónovich cometh to meet him,
 The young merchant, the fighter, the undismayed,
 Called by the name of Kaláshnikov.
 First he bows him low to the terrible Tzar,
 To the holy churches, the Kremlin white,
 And then unto all the people of Russia.
 Keen are his eyes as the eyes of a falcon,
 Burning they gaze upon the opríchnik;
 Over against him he takes up his station,
 Draws on the gloves, the stark harness of battle;
 Slowly he lifts him and straightens his shoulders,
 Smoothing and stroking his curling beard.

Then said unto him Kiribyévich:
 "Now tell me, now tell me, I pray thee, good youth,



A SONG

Of what race comest thou, of what family,
By what name art thou called among men?
I would learn, for whose soul shall the death-mass be
 chanted;
I would learn, of whom shall I boast me."

Thus answered Stepán Paramónovich:

"My name is Stepán Kaláshnikov,
And begotten was I of an honest man,
And have lived all my days by God's holy law.
I have not shamed another's wife,
Nor lain in wait like a thief in the dark,
Nor hid me away from heaven's light.
And verily, verily, sooth hast thou spoken:
For one of us two shall the death-mass be chanted,
And that ere to-morrow's sun be high;
And one of us two shall boast him indeed,
Feasting in triumph among his friends.
Not for a jest, to make sport for the people,
Come I hither this day, thou child of damnation;
I come for the death-fight, the terrible fight."

A SONG

And hearing these words, Kiribyévich
Whitened in face, like to autumn snow;
Shadows of doom flitted over his eyes,
Between the strong shoulders the frost went by
And speech lay dead in his open mouth.

Silently therefore they drew them apart,
And in silence the battle of heroes began.

Then first lifted his arm Kiribyévich,
And he struck the merchant Kaláshnikov
Full on the breast with a crashing blow,
Such a blow that the breast gave back the sound
And Stepán Paramónovich staggered and reeled.
Now there hung on his breast a brazen cross
With relics of holy martyrs from Kiev;
And the cross was driven deep into the flesh,
That the blood from beneath it dripped like dew.
Then said in his heart Stepán Paramónovich:
"What is fated to be shall surely be.
I will stand for the right to the uttermost."
Then he gathered his strength, and made him steady,
Crouched for a spring and a shoulder-blow;



A SONG

Aimed at the side of his enemy's head
And struck on the temple, with all his weight.

And the young opríchnik faintly sighed,
Swaying a little, and dropped where he stood.
Dead he fell on the frozen snow,
On the frozen snow, as a pine-tree falls,
As a pine-tree falls in the forest dank,
When the axe goes through at the root.

And seeing this thing, Tzar Iván Vasflyevich
Stamped his foot on the ground in his wrath
And drew together his fateful brows;
And he uttered command that the merchant straightway
Be seized and carried before his face.

Thus began to speak the orthodox Tzar:
"Answer me now on thy conscience, in truth:
Of thine own intent, or against thy will,
Hast thou slain with death my faithful servant,
E'en the best of my braves, Kiribyévich?"

"Oh most orthodox Tzar, I will tell thee true:
I slew him of mine own will and intent.

A SONG

But why, but for what, will I tell thee not;
To my God alone will I tell this thing.
Give thou but command, and right willingly
Will I lay on the block my guilty head;
Yet I pray thee, turn not thy favour away
From mine innocent widow, my little babes,
And my two young brothers, of thy grace."

"Well is it for thee, liege-servant mine,
Bold fighter, thou son of a merchant's house,
That thou answeredst truth and verity.
Thine innocent wife and thine orphan babes
Will I feed from my royal treasury;
To thy brothers I grant from this day forth
Powers of trading, free from assessment,
Throughout all the breadth of my kingdom of Russia.
But for thee, go up, liege-servant mine,
To the place of fear, to the high place of doom,
And there lay thou down thy rebellious head.
I command that the axe shall be keen and fair,
And the headsman his garments of honour shall wear,
And the great bell shall toll for the peace of thy soul,



A SONG

And all the burghers of Moscow shall know
That thou also art not shut out from my favour."

In the square are the people gathered together;
Mournfully boometh and tolleth the bell,
Crying aloud the tidings of sorrow.
In the place of fear, in the high place of doom,
In a shirt of scarlet, a clasp of jewels,
With the broad axe shining and gleaming fair,
Merrily goeth the headsman about,
Rubbing his hands in the pride of his heart
As he waiteth for him whose hour is come.
And the bold young merchant, the fighter undaunted,
Now sayeth farewell to his brothers twain.

"Oh brothers mine and mine own dear kin,
Come kiss me and let us embrace one another
Ere now I leave you for evermore.
Salute for my sake Alyóna Dmítrevna;
I charge her by you that she shall not grieve
Nor speak of my fate to my little babes.
Salute for my sake our father's house
And all our friends and companions dear;

A SONG

And pray to the saints in God's holy church
For the peace of my soul, of my sinful soul!"

And thus Stepán Kaláshnikov died
By the death of fear, by the death of shame,
And under the axe his luckless head
Rolled down and fell from the bloodstained block.
And they dug him a grave by the river-side
In the open waste where the three roads meet,
The high-roads of Túla, Riazán and Vladímir;
And they heaped on his body an earthen mound,
And they planted a cross above his head;
And the winds of the wilderness moan and howl
Over the grave that hath never a name.
And the folk pass by on their several ways.
If an old man pass, he muttereth a prayer;
If a young man pass, he pondereth there;
If a maiden pass, she droppeth a tear;
If the minstrels pass, they shall sing this song

Hey, bold singers merry and free!
Dulcimers all in harmony,
Voices of golden minstrelsy!

11

12

13

A SONG

Meetly end your singing now that meetly hath begun,
Giving honour as is due, unto every one.

Now honour to the virtuous boyárin!
And honour to the fair boyárinya!
And honour to all faithful Christian folk!

NOTES

¹ The *opríchniki* were the personal bodyguard of Iván the Terrible.

² Maliúta ("Tiny" or "Baby") Skurátov was the favourite of Iván the Terrible. His name has come down in folk-legends as a word of fear.

³ Uncovered and untied hair was the sign of a disreputable woman.







